

# Philadelphia

## ThinkFest Recap: 4 Takeaways From Eric Goldstein on the Revenge of the Suburbs

*Reports of the death of suburbia are greatly exaggerated, says Goldstein, but it will look more like its city cousin because that's what the newcomers want.*

By [Sandy Smith](#) | November 16, 2016 at 12:00 pm

When it comes to reports of millennials abandoning suburbs for cities, don't believe the hype, King of Prussia District (KOP-BID) executive director **Eric Goldstein** said at his ThinkFest 2016 talk on "King of Prussia and the Revenge of the Suburbs" on Tuesday.

The trends actually point in the opposite direction, said the head of the district responsible for rethinking the Philadelphia region's preeminent edge city, because suburbs offer five clear advantages over cities, both here and in many other large metropolitan areas. However, that doesn't mean that tomorrow's suburbs will look the same as today's, for the millennials do want the kind of environments cities have excelled at providing for centuries. Blending urban vitality and suburban convenience is what Goldstein's group aims to do for King of Prussia, which he also sees not as a competitor to the city, but rather as a potential partner for regional progress. That, however, will take some attitude adjustment all around, he admits. His talk raised four main points:

1. **The suburbs remain in great shape for five big reasons.** Those are: public safety, schools, taxes, jobs, and free parking. Statistics back up the public perception that cities are more dangerous places to live than suburbs. Suburban schools are better not because more money is spent on them, but because engaged parents demand it be spent on the best education possible. Though the gap is closing, taxes in the suburbs are lower than those in the city — and that in turn has led to a reversal of the city-suburb jobs balance to the point where more than three-fourths of this region's jobs lie outside the city limits. And since most of us still drive, stashing the car without paying an arm and a leg for it once we reach our destination still matters.
2. **But suburbia as we have come to know it doesn't have the same appeal to millennials that it did to earlier generations.** The younger set (and a good chunk of their baby-boomer parents and grandparents too) are looking for places that offer stimulating environments and a mix of activities — "the city without the city," as Goldstein characterized it.
3. **Forward-thinking edge cities are retooling themselves to meet this demand.** That's where Goldstein's organization comes in. The KOP-BID is pouring at least \$1 million

into reshaping the road that serves its office park into a bike- and pedestrian-friendly “linear park” that will also serve new residences being built in the district. It’s also championing the proposed SEPTA Norristown High-Speed Line spur to King of Prussia: “How King of Prussia grew without rail transportation amazes me,” he said. “If we don’t get rail transit in five to seven years, in 10 to 20 years, King of Prussia won’t be as nice.”

4. **Instead of city-vs.-suburb thinking, we need to think regionally, city *and* suburb.** Maybe instead of “revenge,” what’s happening is “convergence,” and that’s a process that would be greatly aided by city and suburbs acting together to identify and fund development and infrastructure projects collectively. Goldstein said that once he left his job in the city to take the helm at the KOP-BID, he was surprised to learn how much the suburbs still saw themselves as separate and apart from the city. This contributes to the wasteful practice of luring corporate headquarters from one location in the region to another. “Instead of shuffling the deck chairs around, we need to bring companies in from the outside,” he said. “And we need to come up with a regional plan to fund infrastructure, city and suburbs together. Instead of ‘rail to King of Prussia or rail to the Navy Yard,’ it should be ‘rail to King of Prussia *and* rail to the Navy Yard.’” He pointed to the successful Atlanta-area initiative to implement a regional sales tax that will fund \$2.8 billion in transit and transportation projects around the sprawling Georgia metropolis as an example of what could be done here.